

## Running in the circle: notes from Washington and Kyiv

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The current status of the Ukrainian-American relations reminds of a forgotten picture of old Kyiv, brought back to life through plagiarism of a contemporary image-maker: two ancient record players and stuttering melody that may sound indefinitely long until the string unwinds. In our case, there are two "high parties to the agreement" that keep persuading each other about something, though being perfectly aware of the fact that they are going along the same line which has the properties of a circle. At some point, it becomes clear that there is a strong need either to throw away the old records or start using some more modern equipment.

Zbigniew Brzezinski's recent visit to Kyiv, his new meetings with President Leonid Kuchma, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council Volodymyr Horbulin, Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk, and his public statements, new attacks of Communists for whom "Brzezinski" has long been not a name but a position - all these things happened for yet another time, and would remain "yet another" in the series of similar ones but for the unusual roughness of his waving an imaginary "sabre", warning and attracting at the same time. Brzezinski, probably, remains one of the most influential political figures in Washington D.C. who has an impact on its policy toward Ukraine. His "support team" that accompanied him to Kyiv - including ex-chief of the American military intelligence William Odome, RAND analyst John Tedstrom and Sherman Garnett from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was not just a selection of big names: in a way, Brzezinski, Odome and Garnett were "teachers" of those who are now in charge of the Ukraine direction in the American establishment. Brzezinski's abrupt remark about "disillusionment about the country's economic success" is a bad sign of America's expiring patience, shared even by those who supported Ukraine when the state in its present status did not exist. Zbigniew Brzezinski is a "native" of the American capital, and the fact that he is getting angry means that others lost their temper long ago and do not care anymore.

Probably, being away from Washington D.C., it is difficult to understand several aspects of American foreign policy: of playing the "Ukrainian card" in the "eternal" game between Democrats and Republicans in the Congress, of the failure of all efforts made by the official Kyiv, "exhausted" with Western demands, and, the most important, a clear "vacuum" of the Ukrainian American relations that needs to be changed.

Probably, never before the official Washington has dealt with Kyiv so bluntly, and, presumably, the Ukrainian President has never been so critical in his comments that the West is only declaring its commitment to support of economic reforms in Ukraine.

Let us try to make it clear again. One former national security adviser to U. S. president, Zbigniew Brzezinski speaks about "paralysis of power" in Ukraine, but Ukrainian newspapers, that are eager to quote him rather than quote him correctly, report that he was referring to "paralysis of parliamentary activity in Ukraine". When meeting Brzezinski, the Ukrainian president is concerned that the United States is not going to offer Ukraine as much assistance as is provided to Russia. Another former national security adviser to the U. S. president, Richard Pipes, and the U. S. Ambassador to Ukraine speak about Ukraine as a country that has gained a reputation for its unfavorable investment climate, while their hosts argue that the United States has an outdated image of Ukraine. Ambassador Pifer's extremely harsh words about the collapse of Ukrainian reforms and about the fact that in terms of attractiveness for investors Ukraine is lagging far behind most of Asian and Latin American countries crash against the wall of misunderstanding on Ukraine's side, which makes some Americans suspect that either somebody is having problems with his voice, or somebody else is simply deaf. Moreover, Americans - with their determination to conform to the IMF standards - keep receiving requests to "understand the situation" caused by local features and ... to alter the standards. Bureaucrats from the Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers believe that putting the blame on the "unpredictable" parliament will suffice to avoid clear and specific commitments as to what is going to be done in terms of economic improvements.

Who is right? Actually, the question is meaningless, for it is the Ukrainian economy that remains a victim, no matter what the answer is. Ukrainian officials merely cannot comprehend that Ukraine's

image in the United States cannot be better than her image inside Ukraine. That without "iron and sealed" proof of a breakthrough in the reform course - which would be indicated for the United States by the arrival of American industrial giants to the Ukrainian market, but not by "special" laws that benefit the Daewoo corporation against the GATT - the stalemate in the Ukrainian-American relations will not be resolved.

Instead, the quiet "coexistence" will continue, probably, owing to "hawks" from both sides that may see some "Russian threat" associated, so far, with "pro-Russian" Oleksandr Razumkov who is "digging" under "pro-Western" Volodymyr Horbulin. Also, there are Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk, National Bank's Governor Victor Yushchenko, and Minister of Finance Igor Mitiukov, rather embarrassed about having to justify other's actions. Generally, the scheme is simple: they (i.e., the U. S. government) provide us with assistance funds, and we send them something like remnants that used to be "Bears" or "Blackjacks" in their previous lives and nowadays, liquidated, may be demonstrated to the Congress as at least some contribution to military threat reduction. In the worst case, problems of American investors in Ukraine are solved by means of the notorious "telephone right", which provokes even deeper dissatisfaction of the Americans themselves, most of whom prefer normal equal conditions for all to questionable privileges. They are used to believing officials who claim "we want investments", "we are pursuing reforms", and "you are our strategic partners".

Probably, the United States and the West in general may be reproached for many things, like the failure to understand how complex the problems are, and unwillingness to "be in our shoes", and so on, and so forth. However, it should be noted that they remember very well every promise (including some that were not totally wise) made by every representative of the Ukrainian state to representatives of the Clinton administration. Probably many constituents of Ukraine's image are really outdated, but the point is that no effort has been made specifically to form a positive image of this state in the USA or to ruin a negative one. No matter how much the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington takes the credit for the absence of negative articles about Ukraine in the Washington Post within the recent six months, the lack of negative comments never automatically means a positive attitude. Moreover, this questionable gain is a direct consequence of communication between Stephen Rosenfeld who is in charge of the Washington Post's editorial page, and his tennis partner William G. Miller, ex-ambassador to Ukraine.

The wisest what the United States and Ukraine could do together before the next crisis with allocation of the U. S. aid develops is to implement several - three or four - major projects involving American investors who have strong lobbying possibilities in Washington D.C. In the situation when foreign policy-makers hardly believe any words of Ukrainian officials (in my view, the distrust initially was a reaction to the gobbledegook produced by a Ukrainian official who claimed that "Ukraine supports large collective farms with elements of [individual] farming enterprise"), such projects will prove some positive changes in the Ukrainian economy and bury past misunderstandings and suspicions.

Obviously, such a solution will demand some compromise between the executive branch and the parliament that included practically all more or less attractive property to the list of enterprises that may not be privatized. While both the parliament and the executive branch keep telling Americans that Ukraine needs investments, domestically, when the Americans do not hear, the two branches blame each other for the lack of investments. However, there are also intelligence services that report not only the news provided by the Kyiv-based media. Secondly, there are indicators that let the U. S. government know what way Ukraine is going regardless of whether some in this country's establishment like it or not. In terms of foreign policy, these indicators include Volodymyr Horbulin and Borys Tarasiuk, competition between whom is much wanted to be avoided; in terms of democracy development, it is Mikhail Brodsky as an indicator of relations between business and authorities, and Serhiy Holovatyi and Pavlo Lazarenko's Hromada as indicators of power-holders' attitude to the opposition. In terms of economic reforms, these indicators include Victor Yushchenko and new head of the State Committee for Enterprise Oleksandra Kuzhel, and, to a certain extent, Serhiy Tihipko, Igor Mitiukov and Roman Shpek. The "narrow circle of these revolutionaries" and the long distance between them and the decision-making "people" do not inspire confidence to our "reforms" in the American government. Here it is important to note that being an indicator for the USA does not always mean to receive support; instead, the "indicators" point out to what should be objects of careful observation.

Yes. Many in Washington D.C. understand that the progress of reforms depends substantially on the parliament, and are aware of the fact that a major part of the parliament is "red", though without

realizing that our "red" are rather "reddish". Many are aware of the complex social situation in Ukraine, and of the fact that they, most likely, will have to face the loss of 1998-1999 to the squabbles between the executive and the legislative branches which will leave little hope for impressive progress of reforms, and that U. S. foreign assistance is motivated, primarily, by American national interests. However, all these factors were present last year, and two, three years ago. Year after year, watching words never transform into deeds, seeing Ukrainian economy die, the official Washington has moved in its attitude to Ukraine from expectation (1995) through irritation (1996) and contempt (1997) to indifference (1998). This dynamics of U. S. attitude to Ukraine is probably the most dangerous sign I've seen in Washington D.C. Much time will be needed in order to restore mutual trust, and the knowledge of sophisticated Washington "corridors" is not enough to eliminate all the problems and get at least to the level of 1995. Americans are not inclined to see "mean" Communists in the parliament as the only impediment to the reform process. Instead, they believe it is the executive branch that does not carry out reforms. Moreover, they view this executive branch as badly corrupt, and this assessment, confirmed in reports and analytical pieces, is the hardest to beat.

Yes, the official Washington is aware of the presidential elections in Ukraine due in October 1999, and they will make up their mind as to whom they will support. The American support should not be a subject of mythology: it is not going to be financing of the presidential campaign as it is seen in Kyiv. The support probably means warm words and, probably, IMF loans, like the ones provided before the 1996 presidential elections in Russia and actually supported Boris Yeltsin's re-election bid. Is the same scenario possible in Ukraine? Yes and no. First, Russia, as the major regional power, is geopolitically more important, in Washington's view, than Ukraine, therefore, in the case of Russia giving the assistance money was not the issue. However, it is inability to absorb Ukraine that keeps Russia from reemerging as a superpower. This fact is also clear to decision-makers in Washington D.C., not without the efforts of Brzezinski, who, apparently, will force himself and insist on providing Ukraine with more IMF loans, at least so that to help Kyiv avoid the financial crash. Ukraine gave much more promise than Russia did, as statements made by Ukrainian officials were far more radical than the ones made by their Russian counterparts. In a sense, Washington became a victim of too high expectations regarding Ukraine. However, many in Ukraine also expected a different outcome.

Currently, Oleksandr Moroz is viewed as the most real alternative to Leonid Kuchma at the forthcoming presidential elections. He is as little known to the United States as to a major part of the Ukrainian political elite. He cannot be regarded as a mere career pursuer who uses leftist slogans but misses the celebration of the anniversary of the 1917 October revolution claiming he is ill: anyway, it is because of the leftist slogans that Moroz's voters will prefer him. Yes, the official Washington is worried about Moroz's anti-Western and anti-NATO rhetoric, and some tend to demonize Moroz due to those statements, but it is understood that the demonized image prevents objective estimations of Moroz's chances. Moreover, it is suspected that Moroz does not accept the West at all, and that he is easy to manipulate.

However, the official Washington is also realistic about chances of Victor Yushchenko, though some in Ukraine would like to secure Washington's support for him. Hence, Oleksandr Moroz is beginning to get close attention, as the official Washington realizes from the experience of 1994 that it is unable to influence the outcome of the presidential elections in Ukraine, and that after all, they will have to deal with the one Ukrainian voters elect. Actually, in 1994 Leonid Kuchma was demonized in Washington D.C. as much as Oleksandr Moroz is in 1998. However, a major part of the Washington establishment believe they should continue to hope that Leonid Kuchma is able to implement the reform course. Will the old record of mutual assurances play more?

of parliamentary factions (from which Oleksandr Moroz, as usually, "disappeared"), Pavlo Lazarenko suggested that Ukraine could succeed by means of encouraging its own financial oligarchies similar to the once created in Russia. To Brzezinski's bewildered question whether it would be better if equal opportunity to do business existed for all, Lazarenko took about half an hour trying to refute his own words. I cannot agree with Brzezinski's view that Lazarenko's position corresponds with the MP's ideas of a man who quoted very modest amount in his annual income tax return. Rather, I am inclined to believe that Pavlo Lazarenko was trying to guess what Brzezinski wanted to hear - and missed. Anyway, meetings with other potential leaders gave Americans no grounds to believe that they will be easier to cooperate with than the current Ukrainian government, so the problems should be addressed whatever the developments are.